

A 560

S E R M O N

PREACH'D at

PINNERS-HALL,

JANUARY 4, 1735-6:

Occasioned by the

D E A T H

O F

JOHN HOLLIS, Esq:

By JEREMIAH HUNT, D.D.

L O N D O N:

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TO

Mrs HANNAH HOLLIS,

RELICT of the late

JOHN HOLLIS, Esq;

the following

SERMON

IS INSCRIBED,

By her very humble Servant,

JER. HUNT.

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TO

Mrs. Hannah Hollis

RECEIVED OF THE

JOHN HOLLIS, Esq.



STERMON

is inscribed

By the Rev. James Smith

JOHN HOLLIS

I P E T. i. 24, 25.

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man, as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away : But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you.

IN the 22d verse of this chapter the apostle exhorts the christians, to whom he directs this epistle (whether jewish or gentile converts, tho' I am inclined to think the latter) to unfeigned and *fervent love one to another*. This he presses upon them v. 23. from the consideration of their *being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*. In v. 3. he had *blessed God, even the*

*the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in as much as through his abundant mercy he had begotten us [christians] again unto a lively hope (a hope that giveth life, * or that inspires with joy, and is active and lively) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And now he makes use of this privilege, as an argument to prevail with them to exercise undissembled and fervent mutual affection. Since you christians are related to each other, as being born again of the same father, and by the same seed, which is more excellent than that from whence you derived your natural birth, which was corruptible, but the other incorruptible (viz. the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever) see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently. And it should be no surprise, that the source of our natural birth is represented by me as corruptible; since all flesh is as grass. This will give some*

* Vid. *Whitby*. John iv. 10, 11, 14. Rev. vii. 17. John vi. 51. vii. 38. Heb. x. 20. The Syriac renders it, *the hope of Life*.

light to what our Saviour says * in answer to that inquiry of *Nicodemus*: *How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?* No, nor if he could, would it avail any thing to his entering into the kingdom of God: for *that which is born of the flesh, is flesh: and all flesh is as grass. The Jews valued themselves upon being the children and descendants of Abraham, but in regard of their natural descent, as men, they had no peculiar or distinguish'd privilege. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word, which by the Gospel is preached to you.*

In these words, which are a citation from the prophet *Isaiah*, † we have

- I. A description of every man's liability to decay and corruption,

* John iii. 6.

† *Isaiah* xl. 6.

with

with all his worldly glory, illustrated by a proper similitude: *For all flesh is as grass, and the glory of * man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.*

II. A representation on the contrary of the duration and permanency of the word of the Lord: *But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

III. The explication of this word: *And this is the word, which by the Gospel is preached to you.*

I. The apostle gives us a description of every man's liableness to decay and corruption, with all his worldly glory, illustrated by the similitude of *grass, and the flower of grass.*

* Some good manuscripts, with the Vulg. and Syr. versions for *endure of man*, read *av's of it*, that is, *flesh*: which however does not alter the sense. Vid. *Mill.*

All flesh in the greatest extent, however dignified and distinguished, the prince, as well as the peasant ; the rich, the mighty, and the honourable, as well as the poor, weak, and base. Every one, let his internal vigour, or external circumstances be what they will, shall feel decay, droop, and die. The periods of this change indeed vary. Some drop in infancy and childhood, others reach to manhood and more advanced age ; but there is no one, who can possibly escape it : *It is appointed unto men once to die* *. Tho the word *flesh*, by a usual trope, is put to signify *man* ; yet, it is probable, the apostle uses it here to lead us into his true meaning, that when he compares man to grass on the account of his liableness to corruption, he has a regard only to his material part. This is evident from the preceding verse, where he represents the principle of our natural birth to be *corruptible seed*, as the principle of our spiritual birth on the contrary is *incorruptible*. Whereas the mind does not arise from matter, or any modifications of

* Heb. ix. 27.

it, and is in Scripture constantly represented to be distinct from it. *All flesh is as grass*: This image is used by other writers *, *All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass—Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man, that shall die; and of the son of man, which shall be made as grass? My days are like a shadow, that declineth; and I am withered like grass.—As for man, his days are as grass, as the flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more.—As the flower of the grass he shall pass away, for the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away.* This allusion is

* Ὅτι ὡς φύλλον γένει, τοίνυν καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
Homer Il. ζ 146. Isa. xl. 6, 7, 8. li. 12.
Psal. cii. 11. ciii. 15. James i. 10, 11.

beautiful and elegant, and carries in it considerable force. The animals which are most celebrated for strength, and the durable and sturdy oak, are alike obnoxious to decay and death; but the liableness of man to change and dissolution is described with peculiar emphasis, when compared with the tender herb. The apostle adds: *And all the glory of man, as the flower of grass.* The expression, *all the glory of man*, denotes every thing that makes man illustrious, sets him in a gaudy appearance, and occasions him to be gaz'd at and admired by the many; and therefore includes in it comeliness and beauty, vigour and strength, learning and knowledge, riches and wealth, titles and honours. These, in which the persons who possess them are so apt to pride themselves, the apostle compares to the flower of grass with great elegance and propriety. The flower withers and dies off, while the herb remains; in like manner the glory of man frequently decays and comes to a period, before the man drops into the grave, however it cannot survive him. *The*

grass withereth: The herb, whose seed is opened by the warm moisture of the earth, which it's hollow fibres receive and convey to every part, is in itself liable to wither and die. It is farther exposed to decay by external violence, blasting winds, overflowing rains, and the scorching sun. In the same manner our bodies in their frame are obnoxious to alteration and death. The vital fluids lose in time their raciness and balsam, and contract fizziness and acidity. The solids, which by their springiness drive on the flowing Juices, lose their force, and in consequence proper secretions are not made. Hence follow innumerable pains, disorders, and death; to which men are farther exposed by numberless external accidents. But 'tis added: *The flower thereof falleth away*. How soon do the beauty of the face, the air of the countenance, and lustre of the eye fade by illness? The strongest constitution is enfeebled by a sudden relaxation of the nerves. The man, who has with infinite toil amass'd considerable and uncommon degrees of literature, is seisd with a fever, or some other

other disorder, and his memory, if not quite lost, is greatly impair'd, his ideas rise more slowly than before, and are with greater difficulty connected, and in a little time he dies, and *his* * *thoughts* (the designs and projects he had laid) *perish* with him. Riches and wealth, gotten with restless and tiresome labours, are liable to a thousand unhappy accidents, and often † *make to themselves wings, and fly away like an eagle*, which of all birds is observed to fly swiftest and highest, *towards heaven*. Envy and malice with a poisonous breath stain and sully the brightest character: Thus the glory of man is like the flower of the grass which withers and dies. I proceed now to the second head.

II. A representation, on the contrary, of the duration and permanency of the word of the Lord: *But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

In verse 23, the apostle, speaking of christians as born again, takes occasion

* Psal. cxlvi. 4.

† Prov. xxiii. 5.

to compare the principle of their spiritual birth with that of their natural; and whereas the latter was of corruptible seed, the former was of incorruptible, namely *the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*. These last words are by *Grotius* refer'd to *God*. 'Tis no wonder, saith he, that the seed of the new birth should be described as incorruptible; when *God*, whose word it is, liveth and abideth for ever. But the order of the words in the original, according to the opinion of other interpreters *, and the train of the apostle's reasoning, will induce us rather to refer them to the *word*. The Greek, according to them, runs, *By the living word of God, which [word] abideth for ever*. Besides, in ver. 25, it is asserted of the word, that it *endureth for ever*, and therefore it is more probable, that he here intends the same thing; and then, since it is connected with *living*, both must relate, not to *God* but the word. Moreover when the apostle speaks of the seed of our natural birth

* See *Whitby* and *Versf.*

as *corruptible*, and adds *all flesh is grass*, that is, weak, and tending to decay and dissolution; one would expect something in the principle of the new birth, which is describ'd as *incorruptible*, that should exactly answer it: which there is, if *living* be an epithet refer'd to the word. This character is expressly applied by Paul to the word: *The word of God is quick*, or, as it is in the original, *living* *. By *living* is there intended, giveth life. So *living water* is water that imparts life †. *For the lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water* ‥. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever* **. By a *new and living way* ††: that is, *sais Grotius*, a way leading to, and giving life. The opposition of corruptible seed to incorruptible, in the text, leads to this inter-

* Heb. iv. 12.

† John iv. 10, 11, 14.

‥ Rev. vii. 17.

** John vi. 51.

†† Heb. x. 20. *Vide Grot. in loc.*

pretation.

pretation. And agreeably to this meaning, our Saviour saith of his doctrine, *It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: the words, that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life* *. And the great apostle of the gentiles tells us, *to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually is life and peace* †. To this character of the word, the apostle adds, that it *endureth for ever*. That is, in the effect. It is the seed of a spiritual and incorruptible life, a life that will continue for ever. *He that believeth, hath everlasting life. All flesh is as grass, and all its glory, as the flower of grass, they have a principle of decay in themselves, and are liable to be destroyed by external violence; but the word of God endureth for ever, in the life which is produced and preserved by it. That life has no principle in itself of dissolution, external opposition makes it increase, it conquers and survives the world. I come now to the third head.*

* John vi. 63.

† Rom. viii. 6.

III. The explication of this word :
*And this is the word, which by the
 gospel is preached to you.*

Tho' in *Isaiab* it is, *But the word
 of our God shall stand for ever*, expres-
 sing the certain accomplishment of the
 divine promise, as appears from the
 fifth verse, *for the mouth of the Lord
 hath spoken it*; yet that the prophet
 has a reference to the Messiah and the
 gospel, is evident from the context. He
 speaks of the fore-runner of Christ in
 the third verse, and adds in the fifth :
*And the glory of the Lord shall be re-
 vealed, and all flesh shall see it together.*
 The apostle therefore very fitly applies,
the word of our God shall stand for ever,
 to the gospel, though in a sense some-
 what different from that of the pro-
 phet, and more suited to his own de-
 sign. The *seed*, or means, of the spi-
 ritual life of a christian, is the gospel
 preached, which is quick and power-
 ful †. This doctrine recommends univer-

† ἐν παντί.

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sal righteousness and beneficence, a sincere love to God, and an undisguised affection to others, which are spirit and life to every reasonable and intelligent being. *The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, which are perishable; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ||, which shall continue for ever.* Therefore Christ exhorts his disciples *not to labour for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life; which (sais he) the son of man shall give unto you, for him hath God the Father sealed**.* The service of the legal constitution could not make the performers of it perfect, as consisting *only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances.* The Jewish temper therefore was fleshly, they prided themselves in their natural descent from *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,* in their carnal institutions, in the mark they had in their flesh by circumcision, and were moved by the fleshly, that is present, temporal rewards and punishments,

|| Rom. xi. 17.

** John vi. 27.

spoken of in their law. And since *all flesh is as grass, and the glory thereof as the flower of grass*; all those carnal ordinances have waxed old, and vanished away. But the gospel commands real piety, and substantial virtue, inward purity, and true holiness; makes them who practise it's precepts perfect, and is to such the principle of a spiritual and endless life *. In the gospel *life and immortality are brought to light*. By this dispensation we have an express promise of eternal life, and are raised to such an hope and expectation of an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven*; as purifies our hearts, and refines our lives, begins, carries on, and secures a spiritual and incorruptible life, and attempers us to heaven. For which reason it is justly stiled by the apostle a *lively hope*, or a hope that giveth life. This expectation of the true christian, is built upon the firmest and most solid foundation, the promise of the Messiah, whom the

• 2 Tim. i. 10.

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Father

Father sealed, that is, authoris'd to declare it; his own resurrection, as the first-fruits of them that sleep in him; his ascension, and entrance, as our fore-runner, into the true holy of holies, to take possession for us of the heavenly inheritance; and the giving of the spirit, as the seal and earnest of it.

Thus have I endeavour'd to explain every part of our text. Some practical inferences shall put an end to this discourse,

1. Let us set before our minds the liableness of all flesh and it's glory to decay and dissolution. This will answer very good and valuable purposes, especially if we do it frequently. Meditation on any subject, if seldom and rare, will have very little effect or influence; but if it be frequent and with fix'd attention, it will become a vital and active principle. If we often and attentively view every sensible object we converse with, desire, or enjoy, as liable to decay and dissolution, we shall find our sentiments and conduct

will be greatly influenced by it. We shall likewise hereby be freed from an undue fear of man. This is an inference the prophet Isaiah makes: *Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man, that shall die; and of the son of man, which shall be made as grass**: The fear of man, when it rises too high, is not only a troublesome, but a dangerous passion. Truth and virtue are too frequently sacrificed to it. For this reason revelation often directs us to make God our dread, and our Saviour exhorts us *not to fear them, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell†*.

II. If all flesh is grass, and the glory thereof as the flower of grass; we should take care not to over-rate sensible and worldly enjoyments, which are so transitory, and so liable to wither and die. How weak is it to doat upon them, to value ourselves for the possession of them, to place our dependance on them, and

* Isaiah li. 12.

† Mat. x. 28.

to expect happiness from them? Many are apt to make their power and riches their strong tower, and to say, *their mountain shall never be moved.* But every one must see the inconsistency of such sentiments and behaviour with the description the apostle gives of *all the glory of man*; which he likens to *the flower of grass, which falleth away.*

III. By frequent meditation on the lability of all worldly glory to wither and die, we shall be better prepared for all the changes, to which we are expos'd in this life. When we enjoy every temporal blessing as a fine and pleasing flower, which soon will decay and fall off; we enjoy it just as it is in the constitution of the creator, and shall find ourselves guarded against sudden surprize, and immoderate passion, upon the removal of it.

IV. By this consideration we should be prevail'd upon to moderate and assuage our grief, for the loss of valuable friends and near relations. I don't say that you, who are the relatives of the deceased

deceased, should suppress all sorrow, that is impracticable; and if it could be practised, it would not be graceful and decent. A degree of grief is but a just tribute to his memory and character.

Mr *John Hollis* had the advantage of a pious education, which was attended early with success. The principles of religion, which in his youth were instilled into his mind, soon made a deep impression upon him, and became the incorruptible seed of a spiritual life. His great concern was to keep alive those religious and divine affections. And for that purpose, when business call'd him to leave the city and go into the country, he took with him such books, as were written with peculiar warmth, and particularly fitted to excite and raise devotion. He was steady and constant in private as well as public worship, and paid ever a due deference to the appointments of the christian doctrine, and recommended them to the observance of others. His beneficence was considerable and in many instances private, tho

tho in public ones it could not be concealed. He had his passions under great regulation, and tho he did not talk much, he was pleased with the free and chearful conversation of others, even to the last. He was careful and exact in the performance of relative duties: a good husband, and a most affectionate father, always giving his children a handsom liberty of conversing with freedom before him, and at the same time ever concern'd about their spiritual and eternal welfare, not to say any thing of the kind usage he express'd to his menial servants. I could enlarge greatly on this part of his character, were it not, that I fear lest I should raise in his nearest relatives an immoderate grief, which it is their duty to suppress. His patience under pain was remarkable: and if he had any desire to live longer, it was that he might be useful to his family and others. Upon the decease of such a person some degrees of sorrow may reasonably be expected; but great care is to be taken, that your grief be not immoderate and excessive, and break all bounds. Hereby you will greatly offend the

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the creator and governour of the world, to whose goodness it is owing, that you have enjoy'd him so long. The best way to improve his removal, is to imitate his virtues, tread in his steps, and be followers of him, so far as he followed Christ.

v. Let us consider carefully and often the duration and permanency of the gospel, as it is the incorruptible seed of a spiritual and eternal life to all sincere christians, in opposition to the liability of all sensible and material beings to decay and dissolution. From such meditations many useful and important instructions will arise.

i. We shall hereby with greater clearness discern the excellency of the christian institution. Innocence and life were connected in the first settlement of the creator. When sin entered, which was attended with death, faith accompanied with sincere and steady obedience took place, and thro favour intitled such, who were true believers, to a perpetual happy life. By the gospel

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and the dispensation of the Messiah life, and immortality, and the heavenly inheritance, were discovered and brought to light, and received the fullest confirmation. The precepts therein recommended, which are of eternal and immutable obligation, are the incorruptible seed of a spiritual and endless life. If eternal life then, and the method by which it is begun and carried on, are concerns of the highest importance, the gospel, by which the knowledge of both is attained, must be look'd upon as most excellent, and ought to be highly esteemed by every considerate person.

2. From hence we may see the reasonableness of a steady and firm adherence to the word of the Lord. The gospel, which has been preached by Christ and the apostles, and is transmitted to us, is the incorruptible seed of a life, which is not liable to decay and dissolution. *All flesh is as grass, and all it's glory as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, in the life which*
it

it gives. This should influence us to an impartial and unprejudic'd enquiry into the grounds, upon which it's claim to a divine original is founded. And since the design of it is to open to us an endless life of happiness and glory in a future state, and it's precepts have a tendency to prepare us for it; it is not reasonable that little difficulties, which perhaps may arise only from our not understanding it aright, should induce us to reject and discard it.

3. Since all sensible enjoyments are liable to wither and die, and on the contrary the word of the Lord, in the life which it produces, endureth for ever; we are directed from hence to the rightest and most proper pursuit. It is surprizing that so many, who are called christians, should with such unwearied diligence, and restless eagerness, press after the perishing vanities of this world, whose fashion passes away; and at the same time neglect the incorruptible and unfading crown of life, which the gospel sets before them.

If we saw a child excessively fond of a gay and beautiful flower, pleas'd so far with it's gaudy colours, as to disregard other things of much greater importance, and immoderately grieve when it withered and died; could we forbear smiling*? Let us therefore behave as men endued with reason, and form'd for future happiness. Let us act as christians, who are favoured with a clear and distinct discovery of endless glory in the dispensation of the gospel. Let that life and immortality, which the doctrine of Christ has brought to light, be our great and main design, and let us bend all our pursuits to the attainment of it. All sensible glories will wither and die. How happy then will it be for us, to be *received into everlasting habitations* †.

4. If the word of the Lord is the source of a spiritual and eternal life, we

* — *Quid rides? mutato nomine de te Fabula narratur.* Horat. Serm. 1. 1. 69.

† Luke xvi. 9.

may

may see how unreasonable it is to form the hope of future happiness, if we do not find the gospel now to be a vital principle in us. The profession of the christian religion, and a form of godliness, will not then be of any real advantage to us; being only effectual to bring us to eternal life, when it is the seed of a spiritual life; when it so dwells richly in us, as to form the complexion of our minds, and regulate the whole course of our lives. He that truly believes, hath everlasting life. That life begins in a sincere love of God, and an unfeigned love of others, upon which the other duties of the christian religion depend; and the more these increase, the more are we advanced in the life which is immortal. We must view heaven as a state, to which we are to be attempered here, by a constant and uniform practise of real piety and extensive virtue. *Without holiness no one will see, that is enjoy, the Lord*.* Let us therefore take care to guard

* Heb. xii. 14.

against flattering and delusive hopes,
and to pursue with resolution and con-
stancy a divine temper; that *when*
Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we
may appear with him in glory.

F I N I S.

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Page 16. line 8. read *spiritually minded.*

